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## Acupuncture for Muscle Spasms and Strains in Athletes

Athletes, especially Olympians, are notorious for straining and overworking muscles and, at times, causing some serious damage. It's not just during the game that muscles can endure direct hits or tears that lead to bruising, swelling and tenderness, it's during training too.

In some cases, other structures in the body sustain an injury, which negatively impacts the surrounding muscles. For example, a pinched nerve in the spinal column can cause the supporting musculature to go into spasm.



This tension and contraction of the muscles is a protective measure designed to safeguard the original spinal injury. Unfortunately, the spasms can continue for too long and ultimately cause further trauma. If proper treatment is not administered post-haste, this can undermine performance and leave athletes vulnerable to more injuries.

To treat their bruised and battered muscles, to minimize injury, and to maximize performance, many athletes—professional and amateur alike—turn to acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

A longer acupuncture needle for athletes experiencing mild to severe spasms may be used to pierce the heart of the offending muscle. This needle technique involves quick thrusting motions, generally in an up and down or slightly side-to-side direction, to attenuate the rigidity from the contracted muscle. Releasing tension in the muscles relieves pain and allows for proper mobility.

The general idea of using acupuncture needles to address muscle pain and tears is to bring robust blood flow to the area. This breaks up stagnation and helps reduce inflammation. Vigorous blood circulation allows toxic waste materials to be disposed of quickly, and it delivers an abundance of oxygen and nutrients to repair the damage.

Sometimes a compromised muscle can't take direct needling. A practitioner will instead feel for areas of tension or weakness near the site of the injury. A group of points is selected based on their ability to invigorate the muscle. It may be that some of the acupuncture points chosen are not even on the same side of the body as the injury.

For some athletes, there may not be a specific site of pain or strain, but more of a general sense of weakness and fatigue in some of the muscles in the body. Dabao, also known as Great Enhancement in English, is an acupuncture point that can serve well in these cases.

Located on the spleen meridian, it is designed to energize weak limbs and replace a general sense of lethargy with health and vitality. A meridian serves as the route through which healing energy travels on.

Dabao galvanizes the body into delivering a heavy load of nutrients to reach the outer limbs as quickly as possible. In this way, the muscles are nurtured and physical strength returns.

**If you have a sports-related muscle injury, call today for an appointment!**

## **Acupuncture Enhances Performance and Reduces Pain in Runners with Knee Problems**

A 2018 study published in the Brazilian medical journal *Acta Ortopédica Brasileira*, yielded some impressive results for street runners suffering from knee injuries. The study, entitled "Reduction in Knee Pain Symptoms in Athletes using an Acupuncture Protocol," evaluated 34 runners to discover if acupuncture could provide pain relief and improve future performance.

The patients consisted of 25 men and 9 women, from the ages of 20 to 52. The average length of their running careers was seven years, and they trained about 7 hours per week. The time spent suffering from knee pain and injuries was, on average, 2 years and 9 months.

Treatments were conducted once a week for 5 consecutive weeks. Acupuncture points utilized were Dubi, Extra Point Neixiyan, and cranial points. Dubi is part of the stomach meridian and resides on the medial side of the lower border of the patella. Neixiyan is found on the other side of the patella, at the same level as Dubi. Together, they are sometimes referred to as the 'eyes' of the knees. The cranial points are located on the skull.

Researchers documented each study participant's muscle strength, levels of pain, and the number of motor units recruited by the muscles in the lower limbs. Evaluations occurred before and after each acupuncture treatment, and participants were not able to access their answers.

To gauge pain intensity, researchers used the McGill Pain Questionnaire, the Visual Analog Scale (VAS), and the Faces Pain Scale. To assess the amount of motor unit recruitment in the rectus femoris, vastus lateralis, and medialis muscles, they performed electromyographic (EMG) tests.

At the end of the five-week treatment course, nearly all patients reported a reduction in knee pain and an increase in muscle strength. For 28 patients, there was a minimum 50 percent decrease in pain. Another 5 patients reported a decline in pain that was less than 50 percent. One patient did not sense any significant change in levels of pain by the end of the trial.

Researchers concluded that acupuncture is an effective treatment that brings about significant results for runners with knee problems and can enhance sports performance. As muscle strength in the lower limbs improved, the chances of future injuries decreased. This is due to the fact that robust, healthy leg muscles allow athletes to run with more stability and in proper form. The EMG test, they noted, was a critical tool that should be used for monitoring pain and muscular strength pre- and post-treatment.

**If you are experiencing knee pain while jogging, call today for an appointment.**

## **Strengthening Exercises to Reduce Chance of Injury**

One of the best ways to wake up is by giving your arms a great big stretch in the morning, and if you can get on your feet and throw your whole body into it, all the better. Deep stretches are an excellent way to stimulate blood flow and invigorate your body and mind. Not only do they feel good, but they can also be performed as strengthening exercises and help reduce the chance of repetitive stress injuries.

Repetitive stress injuries come in many different forms. A soccer player may contend with tendonitis in the knee from relentlessly kicking the ball across the field. A janitor may feel the pain of bursitis in the shoulders from mopping floors all day. Even sitting in an office for eight hours and typing may cause a person discomfort in the hands and arms, plus pain in the lower back from being sedentary for extended periods of time.



There are many benefits to stretching, even before a problem sets in. One may expect an improvement in posture, a reduction in stiffness from under-used muscles, and an increased flow of blood and oxygen to the brain. Perhaps one of the best ways to counter the effects of repetitive activities is through the practice of tai chi.

This style of exercise is flowing, rhythmic and meditative. The pace is usually slow to moderate. Some may even say those practicing look like they are engaged in a well-choreographed slow-motion dance. In China today, many people, some well into their golden years, can be found openly practicing tai chi in the local parks. Often, it is performed as a group activity, creating a supportive social environment as well.

Tai chi movements are very structured and coordinate with the breath to bring about a more tranquil state of mind. The gentle, continuous flow of the movements is well-suited for people of all different athletic ability. However, there are many common stretches that can also be safely performed at home if tai chi instruction is not readily available.

To help achy or tired arms and hands, try this finger stretch. Start by extending your arm in front of you, with your palm facing outwards. Spread your fingers and gently, one by one, pull each finger delicately toward your body. Spend a few seconds massaging each one if you feel inclined. When finished, wring out your hands by giving them a good shake.

Another good way to loosen up tension in the hands and forearms is to do the wrist stretch. Simply tap the insides of your wrists together 8 times and then do the same for the outsides of your wrists. Your fingers should be pointing upwards during the inner wrist move, and conversely, they will be dangling upside down for the outer move.

The shoulders may need some attention and loosening up, as they tend to become stressed without us even realizing it. Every couple of hours or so, take a few minutes to engage in shoulder rolls. Lift your shoulders as high as they will go while leaving the rest of your arms relaxed. Roll the shoulders forward three to four times, and then roll them backwards three to four times.

Sometimes life gets busy and it's easy to forget ourselves as we delve into a project or work. Setting an alarm for every hour can help you remember to bring attention to those body parts which absorb stress easily. For many, these include the shoulders, jaw and lower back.

**If reaching a level of physical comfort is proving to be difficult, call today for an appointment.**

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## **Tendonitis Relief and Recovery**

Tendonitis is a painful condition resulting from inflammation of the tendons. Tendons are thick bands of strong fibrous tissue that link bone to muscle. Although they are designed to withstand extreme pressure, certain circumstances will produce swelling and pain in the area. Sometimes performing the same movements repetitively over a long period of time can lead to tendonitis. At other times, a sudden or jarring traumatic event can be the cause.



Repetitive motions from activities like gardening, cleaning, typing, and using the computer can lead to achy, inflamed tendons. Bad posture and not properly stretching before a substantial workout may also be a factor

in the condition. As well, some diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis (RA) or diabetes may lead to tendonitis.

Those over 40 years old are at a higher risk for developing tendonitis. Collagen fibers provide the force that binds all the components of the tendons together, but become weaker and less resistant to stress as we age. The result can be more tears and trauma inflicted on the tendons.

The areas most commonly prone to tendonitis include the base of the thumb, elbows, shoulders, hips, knees and the Achilles tendon. The Achilles tendon is located on the back of the foot, just above the heel. No matter what body part is affected, acupuncture and Oriental medicine may help provide relief and speed up recovery time.

According to acupuncture and Oriental medicine, conditions of pain may be caused by cold or heat, so one of the first things to be determined is whether the afflicted tendon is suffering from a hot or a cold condition. To help explain this, envision an avid tennis player with a red, swollen elbow. The pain is so bad that the arm cannot be used properly. There is visible swelling and the area is warm to the touch. This would clearly indicate a condition of heat, so massage and heat therapies would only aggravate the pain.

Now picture a retired gardener with pain in his right elbow. The pain is in a fixed location and slight swelling is visible. His body often feels cold, especially his hands and the elbow with tendonitis. Chilly, damp nights increase the levels of pain to the point where he needs to take pain relievers. Light massage and heat therapies alleviate the pain and feel good when applied. All factors point to a condition of cold. These two patients will receive largely different treatments since they do not share the same diagnosis.

**If you experience stiff thumbs worsening on cold, winter nights, find your knees unable to take the pressure of your workout routine or worry you may have other symptoms of tendonitis call for an appointment today.**

